

Seaside Park Elementary
Stronger Together



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March 10th, 2021

Anglophone School District - South
490 Woodward Ave
Saint John, NB E2K 5N3

Dear ASD-S District Education Council,

The Seaside Park Elementary School PSSC is writing in response to the DEC's analysis on reducing the transportation walking zone to 750m, as presented at the February 10th, 2021 DEC meeting. This year, transportation to and from school has been a major concern within our school community. The data presented with this review showed Seaside Park Elementary having 244 out of 477 students that fall in the 750m to 1.5km zone. These students currently do not qualify for bussing and represent over half of our school population. In previous years, courtesy bussing was in place. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, this courtesy was taken away.

We believe it is important to highlight some of the unique challenges faced by our families and staff related to this issue. When considering the age of our students, the geography of the area, the layout of school grounds, and family schedules, drop-off and pick-up times have become a major source of stress for families and staff and have impacted attendance numbers at school. We would like to see bussing zones expanded, so more students in our school community would qualify for bussing.

Our unique geographical challenges are a point for concern. We have a large student population walking uphill, with some streets being quite steep. With the elevation increasing from 10m above sea level at Market Place to 51 m above sea level at Seaside Park, 1.5km away, the elevation from the lower west side to Seaside Park is 41m. On the other side of our zone, within 1.5km, we have students coming from subdivisions beyond Fundy Heights that require them to cross busy streets and busy train tracks without barriers to block traffic. These features should be considered when looking at transportation needs.

The loss of bussing has led to many parents having to drive and drop off their children at school. Seaside Park was designed for effective bus drop off, but not additional passenger vehicle traffic. The sharp increase in traffic during drop off and pickup has created safety concerns. Long lines are adding to drop-off time; side streets and crosswalks can be dangerous for walkers with the added traffic, and impatient drivers are also a major concern for the safety of our students, families and staff. Local police have been contacted to help improve road safety. This has helped but isn't available on a regular basis and has also caused anxiety with parents and students due to police being present outside of school in the morning.

There are also Seaside Park families that do not have access to transportation at drop-off and pick-up times. Many parents must be at work before drop-off time and are not able to arrive late at their job, due to the nature of their work. Previously, many of these students were able to access courtesy bussing, which would allow parents to ensure their child(ren) got on their bus before going to work, allowing both the children and parents to arrive on time at their destinations. There are also parents with physical limitations that prevent them from walking their child(ren) to school or have younger children they must bring with them for the walk to school.

Winter months bring a new array of concerns. Recent changes made to snow removal plans by the city have caused most sidewalks to not be cleared, resulting in many walkers having to move to the road. Snowbanks combined with a lot of on-street parking, make the conditions unsafe for walkers on their way to school.

The increase in drop-offs has also caused added stress on school staff. Teachers and school personnel are now required to maintain a safe drop off zone, essentially becoming traffic monitors instead of getting ready to welcome students for the day. This has led to unnecessary confrontations with impatient and stressed drivers.

With less access to bussing, student attendance has become a growing concern. With cold or rainy weather, students are less likely to arrive at school on time or at all. As per ASD-S's attendance matters program, "All participants in the system have a role to play in ensuring student success at school and that interventions are in place to affectively problem solve cases of irregular attendance." We feel that increasing bussing availability would be a universal intervention that would help many families.

Officially shortening the walking distance and allowing more students to access bussing would make a huge difference in our school community. As a community school within an area with greater social needs, increasing transportation access would provide a positive support for our families. We fully understand the financial commitment required to bring this to practice, but we strongly believe this change will have a significant impact on the day-to-day lives of our students, families, and staff. For this reason, we would like to officially support any changes that would reduce the walking zones within Anglophone School District – South.

Sincerely,

Andrew Sabin

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On Behalf of Seaside Park Elementary Parent School Support Committee